

## Introduction

From the late nineteenth century, robots and artificial humans have gathered at the periphery of Latin American cultural production. Eduardo Holmberg's robots from his 1879 novella *Horacio Kalibang o los autómatas* took center stage in the work of an author who never arrived at the center of Argentina's literary circles. A couple of decades later, Horacio Quiroga, an author whose production has an important place in the Latin American literary canon, kept his novella *Hombre artificial* (1909) at the edge of his own oeuvre, publishing it as a serial under a pseudonym. While writers and artists have returned to the idea of technological life in a variety of venues since then, from Ernesto Sabato's scientific and technological paranoia (*Hombre y engranajes* 1951) to Julio Cortázar's fear of a cybernetic revolution (*Rayuela* 1963), only recently has a consideration of corporeal identity at the encounter of the mechanical and the organic occupied a central space in Latin American culture. These earlier works presented the various robots, artificial life forms, and technophilia as harbingers of a failing civilization, of the effects of scientific hubris and the uncritical acceptance of new technologies. Holmberg's robots were metaphors for the dangers he saw in uncontrolled immigration in nineteenth-century Argentina; Quiroga's artificial man was a retelling of the Frankenstein story. Even Sabato and Cortázar's more recent works held fast to the idea that the embrace of new technologies resulted in the loss of an essential identity.<sup>1</sup> Recent narratives from various countries in Latin America have simultaneously extended and problematized this vision of technological life, and done so with much greater frequency than we have seen in the past, with both established and new artists

working through the implications of a culture increasingly impacted by new technology. *Cyborgs in Latin America* examines this meeting point in recent Latin American narrative, film, and cultural production where one increasingly finds cybernetic bodies and technological identity at the sociopolitical intersection of military dictatorship and neoliberal policy.

These developments in Latin American cultural expression occur simultaneous to the development of a theoretical vision of the posthuman by critics such as Donna Haraway, N. Katherine Hayles, and Chris Gray. Embracing the revolutionary potential of the figure, especially as it challenges patriarchal and heteronormative values, these theorizations often fail to transcend the North American and European contexts in which they are articulated. *Cyborgs in Latin America* theorizes a peculiarly Latin American vision of technological identity in the postdictatorial, neoliberal reality that is not the case in the situations where we find cyborg and posthuman theory most often cited. By including the narrative, cinematic, and cultural production of Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay, this book examines an articulation of cultural identity that incorporates the technological and organic realities of cybernetic being in a way that extends and challenges current theories of cyborg life.

These theories have contributed in important ways to my thinking about the role of the posthuman in Latin American cultural production, and the dialogue that occurs when we put these theories in conversation with various Latin American countries I find particularly fruitful. While I include various forms of narrative in the book, from more traditional short stories, novels, and films to performance art and advertising, my focus is on narrative and each chapter has novels at its center. The decision to focus the study this way is conscious, and I am aware of the way that this study purports a cultural studies approach even as it is largely a literary study. Nevertheless, I would argue that literature, and especially narrative, is a particularly important place to think through the dynamics of culture, especially a dynamic that is so fully immersed in the symbolic language of technology and the body, where writing, computer code, and the technological brands that we associate

with our identity produce signs that demand interpretation. I find myself also heavily influenced by Katherine Hayles's view of literature, especially as it relates to her own work on the development of posthuman identity in the United States and in Europe: "Literary texts are not, of course, merely passive conduits. They actively shape what the technologies mean and what the scientific theories signify in cultural contexts. They also embody assumptions similar to those that permeated the scientific theories at critical points" (1999: 21).

She then continues, "In this regard, the literary texts do more than explore the cultural implications of scientific theories and technological artifacts. Embedding ideas and artifacts in the situated specificities of narrative, the literary texts give these ideas and artifacts a local habitation and a name through discursive formulations whose effects are specific to that textual body" (22). Hayles's point is well taken; as we work through the technologies of state, of economy, of quotidian life, the literature that grapples with the formations of new kinds of hybrid subjectivities offers us a series of symbols and images that help us navigate the newly formed social realities of post-dictatorship and neoliberal Latin America. My project is, then, to understand how the literary cyborg figure helps us think through the various context-specific cultural realities that we see presented.

In so doing, I propose that we read texts presented as "realistic" alongside those from a more "science fiction" perspective. When one speaks of cyborgs and the posthuman, one usually thinks of works of speculative fiction that present future realities that have yet to occur. Indeed, much of the critical work undertaken on intersections of literature, culture, and the posthuman focuses on either cyberpunk literature (see, e.g., Thomas Foster's excellent *The Souls of Cyberfolk*) or new technologies still at the bleeding edge of development (if we can speak of the Transhumanist Society as part of culture, we must admit that it has yet to exercise a large presence in day-to-day life). In this book, I am interested in exploring how science fiction and fiction specifically coded as not science fiction run together in their consideration of human being as it appears in

an increasingly technological world. Latin America serves as an especially important case study as it adds the prism of technological transfer, of the postdictatorships, and the neoliberal policies of the 1990s that have served as the backdrop to the rapid introduction of Internet technologies. This prism, especially, has been absent in the majority of studies of articulations of the posthuman. In so doing, I also want to distance this project from other critical efforts regarding Latin American literature and technology, especially as it relates to a so-called digital age or to the posthuman. In Borges studies, for example, we have recent books such as *Cy-Borges* (2009) or *Borges 2.0* (2007) that make great effort to position Borges as a kind of prophet or pioneer of technology and the posthuman. While such pursuits produce some fascinating readings of the Argentine author, in this project I am not as interested in how authors have anticipated the technological realities in which we live as I am in the ways in which cultural production uses the posthuman to make sense of social and political realities as they constitute themselves.

Chapter 1, “Posthuman *Porteños*: Cyborg Survivors in Argentine Narrative and Film,” examines different expressions of technological identity in Raúl de la Torre’s 1982 film adaptation of Manuel Puig’s *Pubis angelical* [Angel Hair], Adolfo Aristarain’s 1981 film *Tiempo de revancha* [Time for Revenge], and Ricardo Piglia’s award-winning novels *Respiración artificial* [Artificial Respiration] (1980) and *La ciudad ausente* [The Absent City] (1993). The chapter examines the articulation of various political bodies whose prostheses and other technological appendages range from mechanical arms to artificial hearts to an entirely robotic existence. What joins all of these articulations is the vision of a cyborg whose existence stems from the moment in which the technology of torture is applied to the organic flesh of the victim, converting the surviving body into a living robot. In this case, Donna Haraway’s cyborg that forgets and erases its capitalist father is replaced by one that cannot help but remember the father whose prosthetic phallus engendered the mechanical appendages that constitute its existence. At the same time, these scarred cyborgs maintain their subversive ability as their inability to forget their provenance is

shared with all who see them and their mechanical scars. Hence, Puig's woman with an artificial heart, Piglia's mechanical narrator, and Aristarain's dumb protagonist whose mechanical "Speak and Spell" functions as his tongue all call attention to the crime that produced their altered bodies and in this way deny a culture of oblivion in postdictatorial Argentina.

Chapter 2, "Missing Gender: The Posthuman Feminine in Alicia Borinsky, Carmen Boullosa, and Eugenia Prado," examines a curious dynamic that appears in novels from Argentina, Mexico, and Chile. As noted earlier, much of cyborg theory concerns itself with the feminist and queer potential of posthuman theory. Cybernetic bodies escape the need for a nuclear, heteronormative family structure and, because of that, occupy an important part in what Haraway calls the "cyborg myth" of a world free of patriarchal limits and hierarchies. This chapter begins, then, with the Argentine writer Alicia Borinsky's conceptualization of just such a cybernetic character in her novel *Cine continuado* [All Night Movie] (1997) where the metal-skinned Noemí appears to spring directly from Harawayan myth. It then turns to Carmen Boullosa's *Cielos de la tierra* [Heavens of Earth] (1997) and Eugenia Prado's *Lóbulo* [Ear Lobe] (1998), both novels that employ either explicitly posthuman characters (as in the case of Boullosa) or characters whose own discourse identifies them as posthuman (as with Prado) and that present these posthumans as desirous of reclaiming the gender that their posthuman bodies have problematized. This chapter explores the discursive constitution of their posthuman bodies and the theoretical implications of that constitution, especially in the light of the North American and European theory that does not explain this particular conceptualization.

Chapter 3, "Ripped Stitches: Mass Media and Televisual Imaginaries in Rafael Courtoisie's Narrative," combines a consideration of the 2004 marketing campaign Metro 95.1, a Buenos Aires radio station, with an analysis of the novels *Tajos* [Cuts] (2000) and *Caras extrañas* [Strange Faces] (2001) by the Uruguayan writer Rafael Courtoisie. As media technology and neoliberalism have joined to reinforce the spread of each other, the artistic response to this spread has increasingly incorporated a technological discourse. While the radio station posted images

around the streets of Buenos Aires of their personalities where half their faces were robotic in attempt to portray themselves as urban and hip, Courtoisie's *Tajos* marries robot identity and mass media in a much darker examination of human being in an age where psychological imaginaries arrive ready-made in the form of television programming and advertising. *Caras extrañas* then projects this cyborg imaginary into the postdictatorship, where television serves as the national memory of the trauma of dictatorship and the internal struggles between Marxist insurgents and the anticommunist military that set up the military coups and oppression of the 1970s. So, while Courtoisie does not include references to the cyborgs of science fiction that we saw in the radio campaign or in the characters that wander through the work of Puig and Piglia, we see realistically portrayed bodies that can only function as a synthesis of organic being and the technology that infuses it. As the media that is delivered in this technological form appears principally as a foreign import and product of neoliberal policy, the chapter also explores the creation of a "tele-borg" whose technological imaginary is not merely based in mass media but functions as a cyborg at a distance. This cyborg is one whose fundamental hybridity is born as various cultural identities are grafted together and are then generated as foreign technology, Latin American organicity, and blended televisual media interact.

Chapter 4, "Neoliberal Prosthetics in Postdictatorial Argentina and Bolivia: Carlos Gamerro and Edmundo Paz Soldán," focuses on the Bolivian novelist Edmundo Paz Soldán's technological exploration of the peculiar links between neoliberalism and dictatorship as evidenced in a country where a former military dictator was democratically elected in the 1990s to preside over the institution of neoliberal policy. In *Sueños digitales* [Digital Dreams] (1999) and *El delirio de Turing* [Turing's Delirium] (2003), Paz Soldán presents a series of technological bodies and posthuman subjects that inform a historically based critique of present-day Bolivia. This chapter also uses *Las Islas* [The Islands], the 1998 first novel by Argentine writer Carlos Gamerro, to compare a similar use of posthuman bodies to relate dictatorship and neoliberalism in Argentina. In the work of both novelists, we also see the

introduction of the hacker figure as an important element in their explorations of posthuman bodies in the postdictatorship period.

The final chapter, “Video Heads and Rewound Bodies: Cyborg Memories in Rodrigo Fresán and Alberto Fuguet,” explores the various representations of cyborg identity in *Por favor, rebobinar* [Be Kind, Rewind] (1996) by Alberto Fuguet and in *Mantra* (2001) by Rodrigo Fresán as well as in various short stories by both authors. In each narrative, we see attempts to re-form personal, national, and global mythologies that arise from the mass consumption of film and television. This chapter examines the cyborg as the conflicted hero of these mythologies, produced by the human’s constant contact with film as a technological medium, simultaneously conflicted and liberated by its ambiguous, techno-organic body. The chapter includes both a theoretical exploration of film as a “cyberneticizing” agent, especially in the light of theories by Marshall McLuhan, Gilles Deleuze, and Kaja Silverman as well as a consideration of film’s place in mass culture—drawing on Nestor García Canclini and Jesús Martín Barbero. Fuguet and Fresán, in complicated and contradictory manners, expose the posthuman imaginaries that reside at the meeting of film theory and Latin American cultural theory.

Posthuman and cyborg theory have received a great deal of critical attention of late, extending from the ground-breaking work of Hayles and Haraway to several refinings and applications of that theory. The theme of technology and culture in Latin America has similarly occupied the work of many of Latin America’s leading cultural theorists, including Beatriz Sarlo, Jesús Martín Barbero, and Nestor García Canclini. *Cyborgs in Latin America* represents one of the first explorations of the articulation of the technological body in Latin American cultural production. As such, it aims to broaden the scope of posthuman and technology studies both inside and outside Latin America while it deepens our understanding of many of the most significant artists of the current generation of Latin American writers and directors.